

Combinatorics and geometry of Littlewood-Richardson cones

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March 21, 2003

Abstract

We present several direct bijections between different combinatorial interpretations of the Littlewood-Richardson coefficients. The bijections are defined by explicit linear maps which have other applications.

1 Introduction

In the past decade the Littlewood-Richardson rule (LR rule) moved into a center stage in the combinatorics of Young tableaux. Much attention have received classical applications (to representation theory of the symmetric and the full linear group, to the symmetric functions, etc.) as well as more recent developments (Schubert calculus, eigenvalues of Hermitian matrices, etc.) While various combinatorial interpretations of the Littlewood-Richardson coefficients were discovered, there seems to be little understanding of how they are related to each other, and little order among them. This paper makes a new step in this direction.

*This work was done during a sabbatical stay at MIT Mathematics Department. I would like to thank CONACYT and DGAPA-UNAM for financial support.

We start with three major combinatorial interpretations of the LR coefficients which we view as integer points in certain cones. We present simple linear maps between the cones which produce explicit bijections for all triples of partitions involved in the LR rule. These bijections are quite natural in this setting and in a certain sense can be shown to be unique. Below we further emphasize the importance of the linear maps.

A classical version of the LR rule, in terms of certain Young tableaux, is now well understood, and its proof has been perfected for decades. We refer to [14] for a beautifully written survey of the “classical” approach, with a historical overview and connections to the jeu-de-taquin, Schützenberger involution, etc. Unfortunately, the language of Young tableaux is often too rigid to be able to demonstrate the inherent symmetries of the LR coefficients.

A radically different combinatorial interpretation is due to Berenstein and Zelevinsky, in terms of the so called BZ triangles, which makes explicit all but one symmetry of the LR coefficients[†]. The authors’ proof in [6] relies on a series of previous papers [10, 4, 5], a situation that is hardly satisfactory. A paper [8] establishes a technically involved bijection with the contratableaux associated with certain Yamanouchi words, which gives another combinatorial interpretation of the LR rule. This combinatorial interpretation is in fact different from the one given by LR tableaux, which makes the matter even more confusing.

In a subsequent development, Knutson and Tao introduced [13] the so called honeycombs, which are related to BZ triangles by a bijection that they sketch at the end. The paper [11] uses a related construction of “web diagrams” for a different purpose. The appendix in [13] also introduces a different language of *hives*, which proved to be more flexible to restate the Knutson-Tao proof of saturation conjecture [7].

In the appendix to [7], Fulton described in a simple language a bijection with a set of certain contratableaux, similar to that of Carré [8]. As mentioned at the end of the appendix (cf. also [9]), the latter are in a well known bijection with the classical LR tableaux. Unfortunately, this bijection is based on the Schützenberger involution, which is in fact quite involved and goes beyond the scope of this paper.

Now, let us return to the linear maps establishing the bijections. First, these maps show that the LR cones have the same combinatorial structure. Despite a visual difference between definitions of LR tableaux, hives, and BZ triangles, these combinatorial objects are essentially the same and should be treated as equivalent. In a sense, this varying nature of these combinatorial interpretations of the LR coefficients makes them “more fundamental” than others.

Let us mention here a “local” nature of the bijections we present. A priori, linear maps $\varphi : \mathbb{R}^d \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^d$ may require $O(d^2)$ steps to perform. In this case, however, the local nature of bijections allows a $O(d)$ computation. This is especially striking when com-

[†]We should warn the reader that the BZ triangles presented in [17] are different, but strongly related.

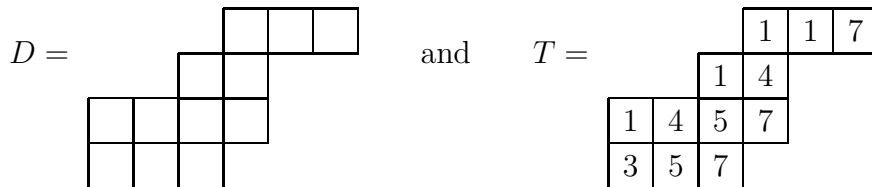
paring the bijections establishing the symmetries of the LR coefficients. As observed previously, BZ triangles show nearly all the symmetries of the LR coefficients, except for one: $c_{\mu,\nu}^\lambda = c_{\nu,\mu}^\lambda$. The latter seems to require $O(d^{3/2})$ operations and is significantly more difficult to perform.

Now, the idea of using integer points in cones is a direct descendant of the earlier papers [10, 5] and most recently has appeared in a context of integer partitions [16]. While the fact that the linear maps between cones exist at all may seem surprising, we do not claim to be the first to establish that. It is perhaps surprising that the resulting linear maps are so simple and natural in this language. We believe that this approach is perhaps more direct and fruitful when compared to other more traditional combinatorial techniques employed earlier (see above).

To conclude, let us describe the structure of the paper. We present in separate sections the LR tableaux, the hives of Knutson and Tao, and the BZ triangles. Along the way we establish the bijections between these combinatorial interpretations. While the linear maps which produce these bijections are easy to define, their proofs are not straightforward and are delayed until the end of the paper. We conclude with the final remarks.

2 Littlewood-Richardson tableaux

Let $\lambda = (\lambda_1, \dots, \lambda_k)$ be a partition of a positive integer n , that is, a sequence of integers whose sum is n and satisfy $\lambda_1 \geq \lambda_2 \geq \dots \geq \lambda_k \geq 0$. Its diagram is the set of pairs of positive integers $\{(i, j) \mid 1 \leq i \leq k, 1 \leq j \leq \lambda_i\}$, which we also denote by λ . If μ is another partition and the diagram of μ is a subset of the diagram of λ , in symbols $\mu \subseteq \lambda$, we denote by λ/μ the *skew diagram* consisting of the points in λ that are not in μ , and by $|\lambda/\mu|$ its cardinality. It is customary to represent diagrams pictorially as a collection of boxes [9, 15, 17]. Any filling T of a skew diagram λ/μ with positive integers, formally a map $T : \lambda/\mu \longrightarrow \mathbb{N}$, will be called a *Young tableau* or just a *tableau* of *shape* λ/μ . A Young tableau T is called *semistandard* if its rows are weakly increasing from left to right and its columns are strictly increasing from top to bottom. The *content* of T is the composition $\gamma(T) = (\gamma_1, \dots, \gamma_c)$, where γ_i is the number of i 's in T . The *word* of T , denoted by $w(T)$, is obtained from T by reading its entries from right to left, in successive rows, starting with the top row and moving down. For example, let



then D is a diagram of shape $(6, 4, 4, 3)/(3, 2)$ and T is a semistandard tableau of this shape, has content $(4, 0, 1, 2, 2, 0, 3)$ and its word is $w(T) = 711417541753$. Finally, a word $w = w_1 \cdots w_k$ in the alphabet $1, \dots, n$ is called a *lattice permutation* if for all $1 \leq j \leq k$ and all $1 \leq i \leq n - 1$ the number of occurrences of i in $w_1 \cdots w_j$ is not less than the number of occurrences of $i + 1$ in $w_1 \cdots w_j$. A semistandard tableau T of skew shape is called a *Littlewood-Richardson* tableau if its word $w(T)$ is a lattice permutation. Note that the content of a Littlewood-Richardson tableau is always a partition. Given three partitions λ, μ, ν such that $\mu \subseteq \lambda$ and $|\lambda| = |\mu| + |\nu|$, we denote by $c_{\mu\nu}^\lambda$ the number of Littlewood-Richardson tableaux of shape λ/μ and content ν . We will use the following example throughout the paper. Let

$$\lambda = (23, 18, 15, 11, 8), \mu = (15, 9, 5, 2, 0) \text{ and } \nu = (16, 11, 10, 5, 2), \quad (1)$$

then the tableau in Figure 1 is an example of a Littlewood-Richardson tableau of shape λ/μ and content ν .

[illegible]

Figure 1: Littlewood-Richardson tableau

3 Littlewood-Richardson triangles

The *hive graph* Δ_k of size k is a graph in the plane with $\binom{k+2}{2}$ vertices arranged in a triangular grid consisting of k^2 small equilateral triangles, as shown in Figure 2. Let

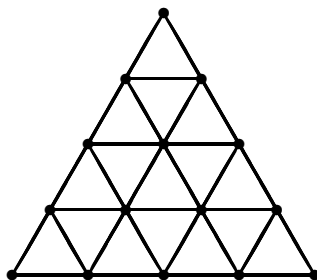


Figure 2: Hive graph Δ_4 .

T_k denote the vector space of all labelings $A = (a_{ij})_{0 \leq i \leq j \leq k}$ of the vertices of Δ_k with real numbers such that $a_{00} = 0$. We will write such labelings as triangular arrays of real numbers in the way shown in Figure 3. The dimension of T_k is clearly $\binom{k+2}{2} - 1$.

$$\begin{array}{c} a_{00} \\ a_{01} \quad a_{11} \\ a_{02} \quad a_{12} \quad a_{22} \\ a_{03} \quad a_{13} \quad a_{23} \quad a_{33} \end{array}$$

Figure 3: Triangular array of size 3.

We now proceed to explain how Littlewood-Richardson tableaux can be coded in a simple way as elements in T_k satisfying certain inequalities. A *Littlewood-Richardson triangle of size k* is an element $A = (a_{ij}) \in T_k$ that satisfies the following conditions:

- (P) $a_{ij} \geq 0$, for all $1 \leq i < j \leq k$.
- (CS) $\sum_{p=0}^{i-1} a_{pj} \geq \sum_{p=0}^i a_{p,j+1}$, for all $1 \leq i \leq j < k$.
- (LR) $\sum_{q=i}^j a_{iq} \geq \sum_{q=i+1}^{j+1} a_{i+1,q}$, for all $1 \leq i \leq j < k$.

Note that the inequality

$$\sum_{p=0}^j a_{pj} \geq \sum_{p=0}^{j+1} a_{p,j+1}, \text{ for } 1 \leq j < k. \quad (2)$$

follows from (CS) with $i = j$ and (LR) with $i = j$; also note that a_{0j} and a_{jj} could be negative. We denote by LR_k the cone of all Littlewood-Richardson triangles in T_k , and call it a *Littlewood-Richardson cone*; this has the same dimension as T_k . Also let D_k denote the set of all k -tuples $\lambda = (\lambda_1, \dots, \lambda_k)$ of real numbers such that $\lambda_1 \geq \lambda_2 \geq \dots \geq \lambda_k$, and $|\lambda|$ the sum of its entries, that is, $|\lambda| = \sum_{i=1}^k \lambda_i$. To each $A = (a_{ij}) \in \text{LR}_k$ we associate the following numbers:

- (B1) $\mu_j = a_{0j}$, for all $1 \leq j \leq k$.
- (B2) $\lambda_j = \sum_{p=0}^j a_{pj}$, for all $1 \leq j \leq k$.
- (B3) $\nu_i = \sum_{q=i}^k a_{iq}$, for all $1 \leq i \leq k$.

Then it follows from (P), (CS) and (LR) that the vectors $\lambda = (\lambda_1, \dots, \lambda_k)$, $\mu = (\mu_1, \dots, \mu_k)$ and $\nu = (\nu_1, \dots, \nu_k)$ are in D_k and that $|\lambda| = |\mu| + |\nu|$. We call (λ, μ, ν) the *type* of A , and denote by $\text{LR}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$ the set of all Littlewood-Richardson triangles of type (λ, μ, ν) ; this is a convex polytope. For example, let λ, μ, ν be as in (1), then the triangle in Figure 4 is in $\text{LR}_5(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$.

Let $\lambda, \mu, \nu \in \text{D}_k$ be partitions, that is λ, μ and ν have non-negative integer coefficients, and suppose that $|\lambda| = |\mu| + |\nu|$. To each Littlewood-Richardson tableau T of shape λ/μ and content ν we associate a triangular array $A_T = (a_{ij}) \in T_k$ by defining

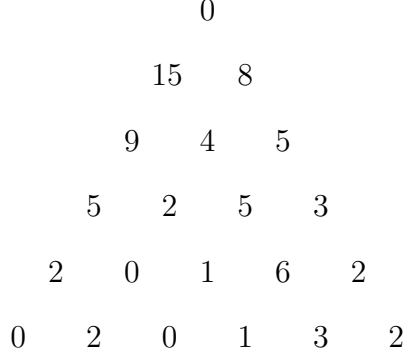


Figure 4: Littlewood-Richardson triangle of size 5

- (i) $a_{00} = 0$, $a_{0j} = \mu_j$ for $1 \leq j \leq k$, and
- (ii) a_{ij} equal to the number of i 's in row j of T for $1 \leq i \leq j \leq k$.

Note that the Littlewood-Richardson triangle in Figure 4 corresponds to the Littlewood-Richardson tableau in Figure 1.

3.1. Lemma. *Let $\lambda, \mu, \nu \in \mathcal{D}_k$ be partitions such that $|\lambda| = |\mu| + |\nu|$. Then the correspondence $T \mapsto A_T$ is a bijection between the set of all Littlewood-Richardson tableaux of shape λ/μ and content ν and the set of all Littlewood-Richardson triangles of type (λ, μ, ν) with integer entries. In particular $\text{LR}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$ has $c_{\mu\nu}^\lambda$ integer points.*

In effect, Lemma 3.1 translates combinatorics of Littlewood-Richardson tableaux into the language of integer points in polyhedra. Various other translations of this kind appear in the literature and are more or less equivalent to ours. A short “verification style” proof is given in Section 6.

4 Hives

The hive graph Δ_k of size k is divided into k^2 small equilateral triangles. Each two adjacent such triangles form a rhombus with two obtuse angles and two acute angles. There are three types of rhombi: tilted to the right, vertical and tilted to the left. They are shown in Figure 5.

A *hive of size k* is a labeling $H = (h_{ij})_{0 \leq i \leq j \leq k}$ of the vertices of the hive graph Δ_k with real numbers such that for each rhombus the sum of the labels at obtuse vertices is bigger than or equal to the sum of the labels at acute vertices; equivalently, $H = (h_{ij})$ satisfies the following inequalities:

- (R) $h_{ij} - h_{i,j-1} \geq h_{i-1,j} - h_{i-1,j-1}$, for $1 \leq i < j \leq k$.
- (V) $h_{i-1,j} - h_{i-1,j-1} \geq h_{i,j+1} - h_{i,j}$, for $1 \leq i \leq j < k$.

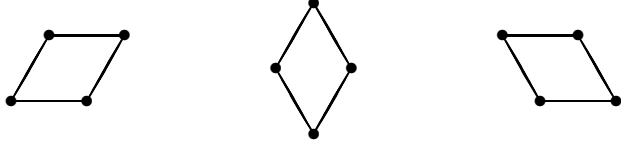


Figure 5: Types of rhombi in a hive graph.

(L) $h_{ij} - h_{i-1j} \geq h_{i+1j+1} - h_{ij+1}$, for $1 \leq i \leq j < k$.

We denote by \mathbf{H}_k the cone of all hives of size k that satisfy the extra condition $h_{00} = 0$, and call it a *hive cone*. As we did for Littlewood-Richardson triangles, we associate to each hive $H = (h_{ij}) \in \mathbf{H}_k$ numbers:

(B1') $\mu_j = h_{0j} - h_{0j-1}$, for $1 \leq j \leq k$.

(B2') $\lambda_j = h_{jj} - h_{j-1j-1}$, for $1 \leq j \leq k$.

(B3') $\nu_i = h_{ik} - h_{i-1k}$, for $1 \leq i \leq k$.

Then it follows from (R), (V) and (L) that the vectors $\lambda = (\lambda_1, \dots, \lambda_k)$, $\mu = (\mu_1, \dots, \mu_k)$ and $\nu = (\nu_1, \dots, \nu_k)$ are in \mathbf{D}_k and that $|\lambda| = |\mu| + |\nu|$. For example,

$$\mu_j = h_{0j} - h_{0j-1} \geq h_{1j+1} - h_{1j} \geq h_{0j+1} - h_{0j} = \mu_{j+1}.$$

We call (λ, μ, ν) the *type* of A , and denote by $\mathbf{H}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$ the set of all hives of type (λ, μ, ν) ; this is a convex polytope. For example, let λ, μ and ν be as in (1), then the triangle in Figure 6 is in $\mathbf{H}_5(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$.

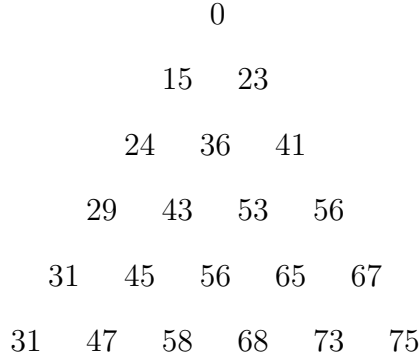


Figure 6: Hive of size 5

For any positive integer k , we define a linear map $\Phi_k: T_k \longrightarrow T_k$ by

$$\Phi_k(a_{ij}) = (h_{ij}), \quad \text{where} \quad h_{ij} = \sum_{p=0}^i \sum_{q=p}^j a_{pq}.$$

Note that the hive in Figure 6 is the image under Φ_5 of the Littlewood-Richardson triangle in Figure 4. We have the following theorem.

4.1. Theorem. *The map Φ_k defined above is a volume preserving linear operator which maps LR_k bijectively onto H_k , and $\text{LR}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$ onto $\text{H}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$, for all $\lambda, \mu, \nu \in \text{D}_k$.*

As mentioned in the introduction, the proof can be found in section 6. Let us mention here two important corollaries. For any polytope P let $e(P)$ denote the number of integer points in P .

4.2. Corollary. *$e(\text{H}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)) = c_{\mu\nu}^\lambda$, for all $\lambda, \mu, \nu \in \text{D}_k$ with non-negative integer coefficients.*

4.3. Corollary. *$\text{Vol}(\text{H}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)) = \text{Vol}(\text{LR}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu))$, for all $\lambda, \mu, \nu \in \text{D}_k$.*

5 Berenstein-Zelevinsky triangles

For any integer $k \geq 1$ we construct a graph Γ_k from the hive graph Δ_{k+1} in the following way: Its vertices are the middle points of the edges of the hive graph that do not lie on the boundary, and their edges are those joining pairs of middle points on edges lying on small triangles of Δ_{k+1} , see Figure 7. We call Γ_k the Berenstein-Zelevinsky graph of size k . The vertices of the Berenstein-Zelevinsky graph are partitioned into

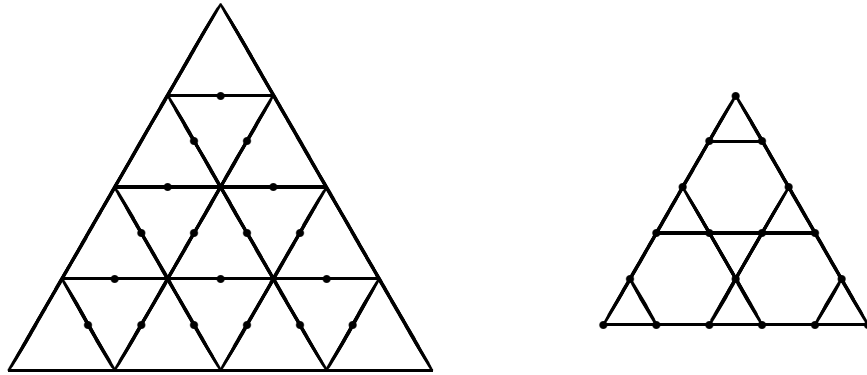


Figure 7: Hive graph Δ_4 and the corresponding Berenstein-Zelevinsky graph Γ_3 .

disjoint blocks of cardinality three, each block corresponding to a small equilateral triangle; these triangles are distributed in the graph: one on the first (top) level, two on the second level, three on the third level, and so on. Let V_k denote the vector space of all labelings $X = (x_{ij}, y_{ij}, z_{ij})_{1 \leq i \leq j \leq k}$ of Γ_k with real numbers. The labelings are carried out in such a way that the vertices of the i -th triangle on the j -th level are labeled with x_{ij}, y_{ij}, z_{ij} as indicated in Figure 8. The dimension of V_k is $3 \binom{k+1}{2}$. Note that the labels $y_{ij}, z_{ij}, x_{i+1j+1}, y_{i+1j+1}, z_{i+1j+1}, x_{ij+1}$ form an hexagon for each $1 \leq i \leq j < k$ and hence there are $\binom{k}{2}$ hexagons in Γ_k . We will be interested in the

$$\begin{array}{ccccccc}
& & & & x_{11} & & \\
& & & & & & \\
& & y_{11} & z_{11} & & & \\
& & & & & & \\
& x_{12} & & & x_{22} & & \\
& & & & & & \\
& y_{12} & z_{12} & y_{22} & z_{22} & & \\
& & & & & & \\
& x_{13} & & x_{23} & & x_{33} & \\
& & & & & & \\
y_{13} & z_{13} & y_{23} & z_{23} & y_{33} & z_{33} &
\end{array}$$

Figure 8: Labeling of Γ_3

subspace W_k of V_k consisting of all labelings such that for each hexagon in Γ_k the sum of the labels in each edge equals the sum of the labels of the diametrically opposite edge, that is

- (BZ1) $y_{ij} + z_{ij} = y_{i+1,j+1} + z_{i+1,j+1}$, for all $1 \leq i \leq j < k$.
- (BZ2) $x_{ij+1} + y_{ij} = x_{i+1,j+1} + y_{i+1,j+1}$, for all $1 \leq i \leq j < k$.
- (BZ3) $x_{ij+1} + z_{ij+1} = x_{i+1,j+1} + z_{ij}$, for all $1 \leq i \leq j < k$.

Observe that any of these three equalities follows from the other two.

5.1. Lemma. *The vector space W_k has dimension $\frac{1}{2}k(k+5) = \dim T_{k+1} - 2$.*

A *Berenstein-Zelevinsky triangle of size k* is any labeling of Γ_k in W_k with non-negative entries. Let \mathbf{BZ}_k denote the cone of all Berenstein-Zelevinsky triangles of size k . Let $\lambda, \mu, \nu \in \mathbf{D}_{k+1}$, then we say that a Berenstein-Zelevinsky triangle is of type (λ, μ, ν) if it satisfies the following conditions:

- (B1'') $x_{1j} + y_{1j} = \mu_j - \mu_{j+1}$, for $1 \leq j \leq k$.
- (B2'') $x_{jj} + z_{jj} = \lambda_j - \lambda_{j+1}$, for $1 \leq j \leq k$.
- (B3'') $y_{ik} + z_{ik} = \nu_i - \nu_{i+1}$, for $1 \leq i \leq k$.

Note that, in contrast to Littlewood-Richardson triangles and hives, a Berenstein-Zelevinsky triangle has many different types. Let $\mathbf{BZ}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$ denote the set of all Berenstein-Zelevinsky triangles of type (λ, μ, ν) ; this is a convex polytope. For example, let λ, μ and ν be as in (1), then the triangle in Figure 9 is in $\mathbf{BZ}_4(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$. Here the x_{ij} 's are written with roman numerals, the y_{ij} 's by **boldface** numerals and the z_{ij} 's by *italic* numerals.

For any integer $k \geq 2$, we define a linear map $\Psi_k: T_k \longrightarrow W_{k-1}$ by setting

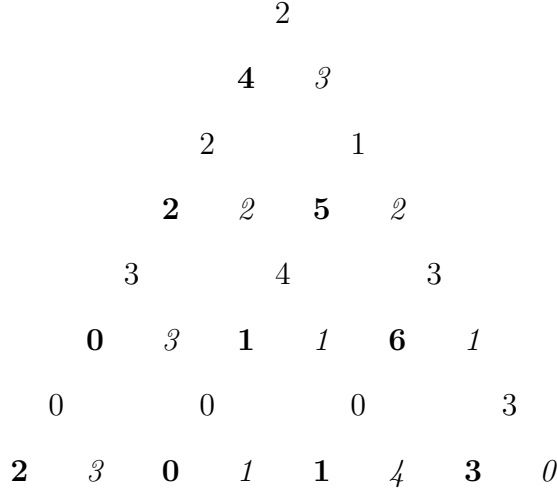


Figure 9: Berenstein-Zelevinsky triangle of size 4.

$\Psi_k(h_{ij}) = (x_{ij}, y_{ij}, z_{ij})$ where

$$\begin{aligned} x_{ij} &= h_{ij} + h_{i-1j} - h_{i-1j-1} - h_{ij+1}, \\ y_{ij} &= h_{i-1j} + h_{ij+1} - h_{ij} - h_{i-1j+1}, \\ z_{ij} &= h_{ij} + h_{ij+1} - h_{i-1j} - h_{i+1j+1}, \end{aligned}$$

for all $1 \leq i \leq j < k$. Note that the values of the x_{ij} 's, y_{ij} 's and z_{ij} 's are obtained by taking, respectively, the differences of the inequalities (V), (R) and (L) used to define hives. It should be remarked that the y_{ij} 's are obtained from (R) by adding one to j . It is straightforward to check that the image of Φ_k is contained in W_{k-1} . The composition $\Psi_k \circ \Phi_k: T_k \longrightarrow W_{k-1}$ has also a nice description: $\Psi_k \circ \Phi_k(a_{ij}) = (x_{ij}, y_{ij}, z_{ij})$ with

$$\begin{aligned} x_{ij} &= \sum_{p=0}^{i-1} a_{pj} - \sum_{p=0}^i a_{pj+1}, \\ y_{ij} &= a_{ij+1}, \\ z_{ij} &= \sum_{q=i}^j a_{iq} - \sum_{q=i+1}^{j+1} a_{i+1q}, \end{aligned} \tag{3}$$

for all $1 \leq i \leq j < k$. Again, the values of the x_{ij} 's, y_{ij} 's and z_{ij} 's are obtained by taking, respectively, the differences of the left and right hand sides in the inequalities (CS), (P) and (LR) used to define Littlewood-Richardson triangles. For example, the Berenstein-Zelevinsky triangle in Figure 9 is the image under Ψ_5 of the hive in Figure 6 and the image under $\Psi_5 \circ \Phi_5$ of the Littlewood-Richardson triangle in Figure 4. Note that the boldface numerals in Figure 9 are contained in the Littlewood-Richardson triangle from Figure 4.

5.2. Theorem. *The linear operator $\Psi_k \circ \Phi_k$ maps LR_k surjectively onto BZ_{k-1} , and $\text{LR}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$ bijectively onto $\text{BZ}_{k-1}(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$, for any $\lambda, \mu, \nu \in \text{D}_k$.*

5.3. Corollary. *The linear operator Ψ_k maps H_k surjectively onto BZ_{k-1} , and $H_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$ bijectively onto $BZ_{k-1}(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$, for any $\lambda, \mu, \nu \in D_k$.*

5.4. Corollary. *$e(BZ_{k-1}(\lambda, \mu, \nu)) = c_{\mu\nu}^\lambda$, for any $\lambda, \mu, \nu \in D_k$ with non-negative integer coefficients.*

It will follow from Lemma 6.1 and the proof of Theorem 5.2 that the cones LR_k and H_k are isomorphic to $BZ_{k-1} \times \mathbb{R}^2$. One can embed the cone BZ_{k-1} into LR_k in the following way: For any $k \geq 2$, let $\Omega_k: W_{k-1} \longrightarrow T_k$ be the linear operator defined by $\Omega_k(x_{ij}, y_{ij}, z_{ij}) = (a_{ij})$ where

$$\begin{aligned} a_{0j} &= \sum_{l=j}^{k-1} x_{1l} + y_{1l} \text{ for } 1 \leq j < k, \text{ and } a_{0k} = 0, \\ a_{ij} &= y_{ij-1}, \text{ for } 1 \leq i < j \leq k, \\ a_{jj} &= \sum_{l=j}^{k-1} z_{ll} \text{ for } 1 \leq j < k, \text{ and } a_{kk} = 0. \end{aligned} \tag{4}$$

Then we have:

5.5. Theorem. *The linear operator Ω_k defined above maps BZ_{k-1} injectively into LR_k , and $BZ_{k-1}(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$ bijectively onto $LR_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$ for any $\lambda, \mu, \nu \in D_k$ such that $\mu_k = 0$ and $\nu_k = 0$.*

6 Proof of results

Proof of Lemma 3.1. Let T be a Littlewood-Richardson tableau of shape λ/μ and content ν , then A_T satisfies (P) by definition. Since T has strictly increasing columns (CS) follows, and since $w(T)$ is a lattice permutation, A_T satisfies (LR). It is also clear that A_T is of type (λ, μ, ν) . Conversely, for any Littlewood-Richardson triangle $A = (a_{ij})$ in $LR_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$ with integer entries, we define a tableau T_A of shape λ/μ by placing in row j , in weakly increasing order, a_{ij} i 's for each i and j . It is routine to check that T is a Littlewood-Richardson tableau of shape λ/μ and content ν , and that both constructions are inverses of each other. Here we use that (2) follows from (CS) and (LR). \square

Proof of Theorem 4.1. Let $\{E_{ij}\}$ be the canonical basis of T_k , that is $E_{ij} = (e_{pq}^{ij})$, where

$$e_{pq}^{ij} = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } p = i \text{ and } q = j; \\ 0, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

We order it according to the lexicographic order of the subindices, that is,

$$\mathcal{B} = \{E_{01}, E_{02}, \dots, E_{0k}, E_{11}, \dots, E_{1k}, \dots, E_{kk}\}.$$

The matrix of Φ_k with respect to \mathcal{B} is lower triangular with ones on the main diagonal, therefore it has determinant one, is volume preserving, and maps $\mathbb{Z}^{\binom{k+2}{2}-1}$ bijectively onto $\mathbb{Z}^{\binom{k+2}{2}-1}$. The inverse of Φ_k is given by $\Phi_k^{-1}(h_{ij}) = (a_{ij})$ where

$$a_{ij} = \begin{cases} h_{0j} - h_{0j-1}, & \text{if } i = 0 \text{ and } 1 \leq j \leq k. \\ h_{jj} - h_{j-1j}, & \text{if } 1 \leq i = j \leq k. \\ h_{ij} - h_{ij-1} - h_{i-1j} + h_{i-1j-1}, & \text{if } 1 \leq i < j \leq k. \end{cases}$$

Let $(a_{ij}) \in \text{LR}_k$ and $(h_{ij}) = \Phi_k(a_{ij})$, then we have

$$h_{st} - h_{st-1} = \sum_{p=0}^s a_{pt} \quad \text{and} \quad h_{s+1t} - h_{st} = \sum_{q=s+1}^t a_{s+1q},$$

for $0 \leq s < t \leq k$. It is straightforward, using these two identities, to check that (a_{ij}) satisfies (P), (CS) or (LR), respectively, if and only if (h_{ij}) satisfies (R), (V) or (L), respectively; therefore $\Phi_k(\text{LR}_k) = \text{H}_k$. Also, it is straightforward to check that (a_{ij}) and (h_{ij}) have the same type; therefore $\Phi_k(\text{LR}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)) = \text{H}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$, for all λ, μ and $\nu \in \mathbf{D}_k$. \square

Proof of Lemma 5.1. We form a system of linear equations by taking, for each $1 \leq i \leq j < k$, that is, for each hexagon in Γ_k , equations (BZ2) and (BZ3). Then, after arranging the variables in the order $x_{11}, y_{11}, z_{11}, x_{12}, y_{12}, z_{12}, x_{22}, \dots, z_{kk}$, we easily check that the matrix of coefficients of the system is in echelon form and has rank $2\binom{k}{2}$. Thus $\dim W_k = 3\binom{k+1}{2} - 2\binom{k}{2} = \frac{1}{2}k(k+5)$. \square

Before we prove Theorem 5.2, let us prove the following lemma.

6.1. Lemma. *The linear operators Ψ_k and $\Psi_k \circ \Phi_k$ are surjective. Moreover, equations (5) give a full description of $(\Psi_k \circ \Phi_k)^{-1}(X)$ for any $X \in W_{k-1}$.*

Proof. It is enough to show that $\Psi_k \circ \Phi_k$ is surjective. Let $X = (x_{ij}, y_{ij}, z_{ij}) \in W_{k-1}$. For each $s, t \in \mathbb{R}$ we define an element $A_{st} = (a_{ij}) \in T_k$ by

$$\begin{aligned} a_{0j} &= s + \sum_{l=j}^{k-1} x_{1l} + y_{1l} \quad \text{for } 1 \leq j < k, \quad \text{and} \quad a_{0k} = s, \\ a_{ij} &= y_{ij-1}, \quad \text{for } 1 \leq i < j \leq k, \\ a_{jj} &= t + \sum_{l=j}^{k-1} z_{1l} \quad \text{for } 1 \leq j < k, \quad \text{and} \quad a_{kk} = t. \end{aligned} \tag{5}$$

Then it follows from repeated application of (BZ2) and (BZ1) that $\Psi_k \circ \Phi_k(A_{st}) = X$. The last statement follows from the identity $\dim T_k = \dim W_{k-1} + 2$. \square

Proof of Theorem 5.2. It follows from (3) that $\Psi_k \circ \Phi_k(\text{LR}_k) = \text{BZ}_{k-1}$; and it follows from (3) and (B1)-(B3) that A and $\Psi_k \circ \Phi_k(A)$ have the same type, for any $A \in \text{LR}_k$, thus $\Psi_k \circ \Phi_k(\text{LR}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)) = \text{BZ}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$. The last claim follows from the remark that different elements in the preimage of an $X \in \text{BZ}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$ have different types. \square

Proof of Theorem 5.5. It follows from (3), (4) and the proof of Lemma 6.1 that $\Psi_k \circ \Phi_k \circ \Omega_k$ is the identity map on W_{k-1} , and that $\Omega(\text{BZ}_{k-1}) \subseteq \text{LR}_k$. The last statement follows from Theorem 5.2. \square

7 Final remarks

Let us start with the complexity issues. Recall that the LR triangles, hives, and BZ triangles, all of size k , are given by $\theta(k^2)$ entries. As defined, maps Φ^{-1} and Ψ require only a constant number of operations per entry, i.e. have $O(k^2)$ complexity. It is an easy exercise in dynamic programming to show that Φ and Ψ^{-1} have the same complexity, linear in the input.

The complexity $O(k^2)$ is in stark contrast with the $O(k^3)$ complexity required by the jeu-de-taquin and Schützenberger involution (cf. [9, 17]). This explains why Fulton’s map in [7] has the same complexity. In fact, Fulton reworks the bijection of Carré [8] which establishes a combinatorial map $\Upsilon : e(\text{LR}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)) \rightarrow e(\text{H}_k(\lambda, \nu, \mu))$. As we mentioned in the introduction and will reiterate below, there is no linear map establishing the symmetry $\text{H}_k(\lambda, \nu, \mu) \rightarrow \text{H}_k(\lambda, \mu, \nu)$. One can use a more complicated map called tableaux switching to demonstrate this symmetry [3] (see also [14]).

Now, the symmetries of the LR coefficients are quite intriguing in a sense that all but one of them can be established by simple means. If one operates with LR tableaux, one simply has to map them into BZ triangles (which takes $O(k^2)$ steps), perform the symmetry, and return back to LR tableaux (which takes $O(k^2)$ steps again). For the remaining $\mu \rightarrow \nu$ symmetry several authors found an explicit map (in different languages) [1, 2, 14, 18] but all of them use $O(k^3)$ steps. It would be interesting to prove the lower bound $\Omega(k^3)$ but we are doubtful such result is feasible at the moment. What one can show, however, is that this ‘last’ symmetry cannot be performed by a linear map already for $k = 4$. We leave this statement as an interesting exercise to the reader, in the hope that further results will be found in this direction.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Oleg Gleizer, Michael Kleber, Alex Postnikov and Terry Tao for interesting conversations and helpful remarks. We thank Olga Azenhas and Christophe Carré for the help with the literature.

The first author was supported by NSA and NSF. The second author is grateful to Richard Stanley for his support in organization of the sabbatical visit to MIT.

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Keywords: Young tableaux, Littlewood-Richardson rule, Berenstein-Zelevinsky triangles, Knutson-Tao hives